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MEDIÆVAL GERMAN SCULPTURE IN THE GERMANIC MUSEUM OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

By KUNO FRANCKE.

(*Read April 25, 1908.*)

There is a curious anomaly in the equipment of German universities, an anomaly accounted for partly by the traditional cosmopolitanism of German scholarship, partly by the somewhat belated development of Germany into a united and powerful nation.

Whereas for students of classical archæology there is provided in nearly every university of the fatherland a well-planned and systematically arranged museum of casts of Greek sculptures, the student of German history would not find at a single one of these universities any collection which would offer to him a fairly accurate representation of the artistic development of his own country. Even in the German capital with its wealth of ethnological and archæological exhibits from Troas and Pergamon, from Egypt and Assyria, from India and South America, no attempt has as yet been made to bring together, in reproductions, the great artistic landmarks of Germany herself. It has been reserved to an American university to make at least a beginning of such an undertaking, but it is interesting to note that the Germanic Museum of Harvard University could not have achieved whatever success it has had thus far, had it not been for the generous interest bestowed upon it by His Majesty the German Emperor. So that this museum, although established on non-German soil, is after all in its way another symptom of the long strides which modern Germany has made toward national greatness and international influence.

The bulk of the collections of the Germanic Museum at Cambridge is devoted to German sculpture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and particular stress is laid upon a good representation of the thirteenth century.

It is not as generally acknowledged as it should be that the thir-

teenth century marks a truly classic epoch in the development of German plastic art. German sculpture between 1220 and 1250 is fully on a level with the great creations of the lyric and epic poetry of chivalry; and no one who is susceptible to the peculiar beauty of Walther von der Vogelweide's minne-song or is impressed with the heroic figures of the *Nibelungenlied*, of Kudrun, of Parzival, or Tristan, can fail to observe their affinity of spirit with the plastic monuments of Wechselburg and Freiberg, of Naumburg and Halberstadt, of Bamberg and Strassburg. Here as well as there we find a high degree of refinement and measure; a strenuous insistence on courteous decorum; intense moral earnestness linked to a strange fancifulness of imagination; a curious combination of scrupulous attention to certain conventional forms of dress, gesture, and expression, on the one hand, and a free sweep in the delineation of character, on the other. Here as well as there we find a happy union of the universally human with the distinctively mediæval; a wonderful blending of the ideal human type with the characteristic features of the portrait. As the art of Phidias and Praxiteles is an indispensable supplement to the art of Æschylus and Sophocles, for our understanding of Attic culture in its prime, so these works of German sculpture of the thirteenth century stand to us (or should stand to us) by the side of the great productions of the chivalric poets, as incontrovertible proofs of the free and noble conception of humanity reached by mediæval culture at its height.

A brief review of a few at least of these sculptures may serve to elucidate this statement somewhat more fully.

Among the earliest plastic monuments of the thirteenth century are the pulpit and the Crucifixion group of the Church of Wechselburg in Saxony, executed probably between 1210 and 1220. In both monuments it seems as though the artist was still grappling with the problem of form. In the relief from the front of the pulpit—Christ seated on the throne as Judge of the world, surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists—mastery of form, classic solemnity, exalted repose have indeed been attained. In the more animated scenes of the side reliefs—the sacrifice of Isaac and the healing of the Jews by the brazen serpent—there is a curious contrast between grandeur and awkwardness, sweetness of feeling and naive natural-

ism. And a similar contrast is found in the Crucifixion group. The figures of Mary and John standing under the Cross, as well as that of Joseph of Arimathea holding out the cup to receive the blood of the Saviour, are remarkable for nobility of outline, depth of feeling, and measured beauty of expression. There is a fine sweep of movement in the two angels on the cross-beam, gentle sadness in the figure of Christ, and a mild tenderness in the attitude of God the Father appearing above. The symbolical figures, however—probably Jewdom and Pagandom—on which John and Mary are standing, are tortuous and forced. Apparently, here is an artist who looks at life about him with a keen, penetrating, and receptive eye, but who at the same time is impelled to subject reality to certain canons of measure and proportion which he has not yet made fully his own.

A decided step in advance is made in the sculptures of the Golden Gate of the Cathedral of Freiberg, likewise in Saxony. In the arrangement of plastic figures, both on the sides of the portal and on the archivolt, French influence is clearly seen. But these plastic figures seem here much more independent of the architectural framework than is common in the French sculptures, *e. g.*, those of Chartres Cathedral, which served as models to the German artist; and the human type and bodily proportions are unmistakably original.

A thoroughly satisfactory interpretation of all the figures, human, animal and fantastic, which cover the sides of the portal, the tympanum and the archivolt, and of the fundamental conception underlying them, has not yet been given, although Anton Springer has done a great deal for the identification of individual personages. Springer thinks that the fundamental conception of the whole is the mystic marriage between Christ and the Church, and that all the scenes and figures of the portal may be interpreted as symbolic of this mystic idea. Simpler and more plausible it seems to me to find in this portal a plastic counterpart to dramatic scenes from the cycle of the Christmas plays, the popularity of which in the thirteenth century is proved, for Germany, by a particularly complete example, the Benediktbeuren Christmas Play. Clearly a scene from the Christmas cycle is the one represented in the tympanum of the portal: the Adoration of the Magi, the three kings approaching from

the left, Mary with the child enthroned in the middle, the archangel Gabriel and Joseph at the right. And no less plausibly than this scene may the eight somewhat under life-size figures which flank both sides of the portal be connected with the subject of the Christmas plays. Prophet and Sibyl scenes were very frequently used as introducing the Nativity play proper, one prophet or Sibyl after another entering to testify to the coming of the Saviour. While retaining most of the names suggested by Springer for these eight figures,—John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, David and Solomon, the Queen of Sheba and Bathseba, David and Aaron,—we may call them collectively witnesses to Christ's Nativity.

As to the plastic representations on the four archivolt encircling the tympanum, they are, to be sure, not taken from any actual scene of a Christmas play; but they are entirely in keeping with the joyous, idyllic character of these plays. On the innermost archivolt, nearest to the Adoration of the Magi, there are at the sides the four archangels, in worshipful attitude; in the middle, the Coronation of Mary by Christ. The next archivolt contains six apostles, three at each side, and in the center Abraham with a soul of the blessed in his lap, while an angel reaches out another soul toward him. The third archivolt shows eight figures of apostles and in the center the dove of the Holy Ghost surrounded by angels. On the outermost archivolt, finally, the resurrection of the flesh is represented by ten figures rising from their graves with manifoldly varying expressions of faith, hope and exultation; while the central group, an angel receiving by either hand a saved soul, fittingly symbolizes the last and highest stage of human redemption. All these sculptures, as well as those of the tympanum and the sides of the portal, are distinguished by a remarkable symmetry and adjustment to architectural demands, and by a wonderful mellowness and purity of form and an exquisite sweetness and serenity of expression, making an artistic whole of extraordinary beauty and perfection.

The climax, however, of North German art of the thirteenth century is reached in the Portrait Statues of Founders and Patrons of Naumburg Cathedral from the west choir of that church, a series of works which may be definitely assigned to the middle of the thirteenth century. These statues, together with that of a young

ecclesiastic from the same church, are a striking refutation of what since Jacob Burckhardt's "*Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*" has come to be a popular axiom, the assumption, namely, that modern individualism had its origin in the era of the *rinascimento*; they show conclusively that Burckhardt's phrase of "the discovery of the individual" by the great Italians of the quattro-cento is misleading, that, in other words, the Middle Ages themselves contain the germs of modern individualism. There is nothing in the art of the Renaissance which surpasses these Naumburg statues in fulness, distinctness, and vigor of individual life. Every one of these figures is a type by itself, a fully rounded personality. The two pairs of princely husband and wife, one of the men full of power and determination, the other of youthfully sanguine appearance, one of the women broadly smiling, the other, with a gesture full of reserved dignity, drawing her garment to her face; the canoness standing erect, but with slightly inclined head, thoughtfully gazing down upon a book which she supports with one hand while the other turns over its leaves; the princess drawing her mantle about her; the young ecclesiastic with his carefully arranged hair flowing from his tonsure, holding the missal in front of him; the various knights, one looking out from behind his shield, another supporting his left on the shield and shouldering the sword with his right hand, a third resting both shield and sword in front of him on the ground, while with his right hand he gathers his mantle about his neck, others in still different postures and moods,—there is not a figure among them which did not represent a particular individual at a particular moment, and which did not, without losing itself in capricious imitation of accidental trifles, reproduce life as it is. It is impossible in the face of such works of sculpture as these not to feel that they proceeded from artists deeply versed in the study of human character, fully alive to the problems of human conduct, keenly sensitive to impressions of any sort—in other words, fully developed, highly organized, complicated individuals. One feels that here are seen the mature artistic fruits of the great Hohenstaufen epoch—an epoch rent by tremendous conflicts in church and state, and convulsed by the throes of a new intellectual and spiritual birth.

Almost contemporary with these statues, though probably some-

what younger, is the Naumburg Rood Screen separating the west choir of the Cathedral from the nave. The sculptures of this rood screen form an interesting contrast to the sculptures of the Freiberg Golden Gate, analyzed before. While the Freiberg sculptures present a plastic counterpart to the mediæval Christmas plays, we have in the Naumburg rood screen a plastic counterpart to the Passion plays. On the middle beam of the door leading through the screen, which has the shape of a cross, the figure of the dying Saviour is suspended, while on each side of the door there stand in niches the over life-size figures of Mary and John. The other scenes of the Passion, from the Last Supper to the Bearing of the Cross, are brought to view in high reliefs which as a continuous frieze, crowned by a Gothic canopy, give to the whole structure a most impressive attic-like top. These sculptures seem to mark a stage of development somewhat beyond that reached by the Naumburg portrait statues. They are signalized by intense dramatic power. Some of the scenes of the frieze in particular impress one as direct transpositions into stone of scenes from the Passion Play stage. They excel even the portrait statues in freedom and sweep of movement and in keenness of realistic characterization. On the other hand, they show a tendency toward exaggeration, which occasionally (as in John and Mary) leads to a strained and distorted expression of feeling; and, in the portrayal of the vulgar and the commonplace, they occasionally (as in the representatives of the Jewish rabble) diverge into caricature. They are, then, clear anticipations of the ultra-naturalistic, and therefore unnatural tendency of later Gothic sculpture.

We may properly close our review by selecting at least one group of South German sculptures affording a striking example of the strong influence exerted by French Gothic art upon this part of Germany: I mean the "Death of Mary" and the "Ecclesia and Synagoga" from the Romanesque portal of Strassburg Cathedral. The Death of Mary is one of the noblest creations in the whole history of art. The Virgin is represented reclining on a couch, wrapped in a garment which reveals with rare delicacy the lines of her body. Her face is majestic, Juno-like. Although the moment represented is after her death, her eyes are still open and have a

look of heavenly exaltation. Behind her couch, in the middle of the tympanum, stands Christ, holding Mary's soul (in the form of an infant) in his left hand, his right hand raised in blessing. Mary Magdalen cowers in front of the couch, wringing her hands, her face expressing deepest sorrow. The space at the sides and back of the death-bed is filled with the figures of the Disciples, some of them giving way to grief, others contemplative, others transfigured, all of them filled with holy awe and deep religious feeling. The graceful vine which runs along the edge of the Romanesque arch of the tympanum gives to the whole composition a fitting enclosure. In this monument the French sense of form and German feeling seem most happily blended.

Of no less refinement are the statues of Ecclesia and Synagoga. To contrast the Church triumphant and the Synagogue defeated was a very common conception both in the religious sculpture and in the religious drama of the Middle Ages. Noteworthy instances of their occurrence in sculpture are the statues of Rheims Cathedral, the north portal of Bamberg Cathedral, and the vestibule of the Cathedral of Freiburg im Breisgau; of their introduction into the drama, the part played by them in the *Ludus de Antichristo* and the *Alsfeld Play*. Of all plastic representations, these Strassburg statues are the most exquisite. The Church, with wide-flowing mantle, the crown on her head, her right hand holding the standard of the cross, her left bearing the communion chalice, stands erect and dignified at the left side of the portal, looking with pride and disdain at her adversary on the opposite side. The Synagogue wears neither crown nor mantle; in her left hand she holds the table of the Mosaic law turned downward, in the right a standard, the shaft of which is broken in many places; her eyes are bandaged (to indicate that she does not see the true light), and her face is turned away from the Church and is bent slightly down. In spite of her humiliation, she appears more human and lovable than her victorious rival. Both figures together are perhaps unsurpassed in mediæval sculpture for grace and delicacy of outline; only in the somewhat coquettish twist of the hips there is observable a slight indication that the highest point in the classic epoch of plastic art

has already been passed and that the age of extravagant emotion and artificiality is setting in.

When, in November, 1903, these and other precious gifts of the German Emperor were temporarily installed in the insignificant little building which Harvard University could spare for them as a scanty shelter, it was hoped that only a short time would elapse before a new and worthy museum building would have been erected through the liberality of American friends of German culture. These hopes have not yet been fulfilled. Here is the opportunity for our fellow citizens of German origin to prove to the world that they do not leave their ideals at home when they leave the fatherland; and here is a chance for all Americans to show their appreciation of what German culture has given to this country.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.